

I HOPE YOU DIE SOON

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WORDS ON NON-DUALITY AND LIBERATION

Richard Sylvester

NON-DUALITY PRESS

For Jo and Sam

And in deep gratitude to Jen, Tony and Claire.  
Without you this book would not have been written.

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It is not easy to write a book about nothing.

## Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	ix
ON LIBERATION	
Preliminaries	13
Awakening—Seeing there is No One	15
Liberation—Seeing ‘I’ am Everything	21
Being Awake and Being Asleep	27
I Hope You Die Soon	29
THE STUFF THAT HAPPENS	
Language	33
The Mind	35
Spiritual Experiences	39
Being a Person	41
The Great Mantra	44
The Impeccable Behaviour of the Enlightened Ones	48
Contraction and Localisation	55
Death and Religion	58
A Life Left in Ruins	64
Natural and Neurotic Feelings	66
Therapy and Meditation	68
Paradise is Now	70

THE AVATAR OF THE SINGLE MALT	75
AN INTERVIEW	79
A TALK	95

## Introduction

The most common misconception about liberation is that it is something an individual can gain. But liberation is a loss—the loss of the sense that there ever was a separate individual who could choose to do something to bring about liberation.

When it is seen that there is no separation, the sense of vulnerability and fear that attaches to the individual falls away and what is left is the wonder of life just happening. Instead of meaning there is a squirrel motionless on a grey tree trunk, legs splayed, head up, looking straight at you. Instead of purpose there is the astonishing texture of cat's fur or the incredible way an ant crawls over a twig. The loss of hope is no loss when it is replaced by the moorhens bobbing on the lake.

When the sensation that I am in control of my life and must make it happen ends, then life is simply lived and relaxation takes place. There is a sense of ease with whatever is the case and an end to grasping for what might be.

# ON LIBERATION

## Preliminaries

Liberation cannot be described in words. It cannot be understood by the mind. It cannot be seen until it reveals itself. Then no words or ideas are able to express it and no mind is able to grasp it.

Yet liberation is all there is. Right now.

Paradox.

The seeing of liberation has nothing to do with the mind. Yet here liberation is, covered over by the mind. Covered over by the mind which does not exist.

Paradox.

Liberation is the end of searching and the end of meaning. Liberation reveals the meaning of life as life itself. There can be no searching for that which is seen already to be the case.

Language by its nature describes duality—events, experiences, things, thoughts, feelings. Phenomena. The stuff that happens. There is no language to describe non-duality. The best we can do is to hint at it.

So let us hint.

## Awakening: Seeing there is No One

It begins with Saturday afternoons in Hampstead, listening to discussions about non-duality held by Tony Parsons. I do not understand a lot of what is said but something keeps drawing me there. And I like the jokes and the conversation and the drinking afterwards so I go back again and again.

Then at a central London station on a warm summer evening the person, the sense of self, suddenly completely disappears. Everything remains as it is—people, trains, platforms, other objects—yet everything is seen for the first time without a person mediating or interpreting it. There are no flashing lights, no fireworks, none of the whirligig phenomena of LSD or hallucinogenic mushrooms. But this is the real ‘wow’, seeing an ordinary railway station for the first time without any sense of self. Here is the ordinary seen as the extraordinary, arising in oneness with no one experiencing it.

In that instant it is seen that there is no one. The sense of there being a person has been a constant up to this point and given meaning to this life. For so many years it has never been questioned. It has been so thoroughly taken for granted as me,

my centre and location, that it has not even been noticed. Now it is seen as a complete redundancy. Suddenly it is known that I never had a life because there never was an 'I'. In a split second of eternity it is known that without an 'I' everything is being seen for the first time simply as it is. I do not live, I am lived. I do not act, but actions happen through me, the divine puppet.

Every concern of this small but so important apparent life falls away in an instant.

Within a second, the self returns saying "What the hell was that?" But that split-second of no one brings about irrevocable changes to the internal landscape. For seeing this can blow your mind.

The past becomes two-dimensional. Before this, the past was a three dimensional landscape which I visited frequently. I rushed about in it, jumping from place to place; every scene had energy and reality to it. That energy appeared as feelings and thoughts, mostly about regret and guilt, with themes of "What if..." and "If only..." endlessly playing. The past was consequently tilled and re-tilled, different possibilities uselessly played out as if obsessive revisiting could somehow change the geography, bring back a lost lover or erase some offence given or received. Now, after that split second of no one, although the person has come back, the past is like a flat painting. All the scenes are

still there—this is not Alzheimer’s—but they have no energy, no reality, and there is little impulse to visit any of them anymore. Occasionally one scene or another from the past flickers into life for a while but then it dies away again. Regret and guilt loosen their grip.

Issues and problems still arise but they cannot hang around for as long as they used to do. The rock face which gave toe holds for them to clamber up and grab me by the throat is starting to crumble. The internal landscape has become slippery. As Nisargadatta says, the world is full of hoops, the hooks are all ours. Now the hooks are dissolving. However, during the next year the self frantically tries to reassert itself, sometimes apparently very successfully as issues manage to re-emerge, as boredom, despair, emotional pain somehow still have to be experienced.

One thing that is immediately seen is the nature of all the apparent spiritual experiences that arose during the years of searching and following false paths and gurus. Suddenly they are seen for what they really are, emotional and psychological experiences happening to an unreal person and no more significant than putting on a shoe or having a cup of coffee.

Spiritual experiences are not difficult to evoke. Meditate intensively, chant for long periods, take

certain drugs, go without food or sleep, put yourself in extreme situations. That will probably do it. I had done all of these things and there had been many spiritual experiences. I had chanted for hours and meditated to the beating of mighty Tibetan gongs. I had seen the guru, sitting on a dais in impressive robes, dissolve into golden light before my eyes. Personal identity had refined and dissolved in transcendental bliss. The universe had breathed me as my awareness expanded to fill everything.

So what?

There had always been someone there, having the spiritual experience. A person, no matter how refined, had always been present. These events had all happened to 'me'. None of them had anything more or less to do with liberation than stroking a cat.

And anyway "You can't stay in God's world for very long. There are no restaurants or toilets there."

Liberation is not personal and has nothing to do with any psychological, emotional or 'spiritual' experience, no matter how refined it may be. A spiritual or psychological experience is just a personal experience. Once it is seen that I am nothing, it is also seen that any experience arises only for an *apparent* person and falls away again in oneness with no significance at all. There is no real person

in whom the experience arises and no possibility that it could have any meaning.

And liberation has nothing to do with the absence or presence of problems or issues, which may or may not continue to arise.

Liberation does not bring unending bliss. For that, try heroin, prozac or a lobotomy.

What a relief. Liberation does not require you to be any particular way.

Liberation does not require 'you' to be at all. A person is not writing these words. Oneness is writing these words. And oneness is reading them.

Within the story, the period of awakening lasts for one year. During this time, the person reasserts itself, sometimes strongly, drops away again and returns. For a while there is a desert where personal pain is as intense as before but all the old comforts and mechanisms for dealing with it have lost their meaning. A particular comfort had been the belief that pain was meaningful, necessary to my spiritual evolution. "There's no gain without pain." Now that thought simply appears ridiculous. I am beginning to understand that this awakening is ruthless, stripping away every belief that I have ever held and ever clung to. Now there are no life rafts left, not even a piece of driftwood.

It is sometimes said that this ruins your life. Well, it ruins what you thought was your life. And there is a saying I remember at this point. "Why do you want liberation? How do you know you'd like it?"

My God. Things have got worse, not better. For previously there was hope.

## Liberation: Seeing 'I' am Everything

Within the story, a year after awakening, I am standing in a shop in an ordinary country town. Suddenly but with great gentleness the ordinary is displaced by the extraordinary. The person again disappears completely and now it is seen clearly that awareness is everywhere and everything. The localised sense of self is revealed to be just an appearance. There is no location, no here or there. There is only oneness appearing as everything and this is what 'I' really am. 'I' am the shop, the people, the counter, the walls and the space in which everything appears. When the self disappears, and awareness is seen as everything, then this is seen for what it is, a wonderful hologram sustained by love.

At a certain time as a child, awareness appears to coagulate into a discrete space, becoming solid and separate from everything else. This is what creates the sense of 'me' with its hopes and fears and loves and burdensome responsibilities. The thoughts and feelings and sensory phenomena, which really simply arise in awareness, are now owned by someone, are now felt to belong to 'me'. And so the drama of being a person starts.

There is no locality to awareness other than 'everywhere'. There is only liberation. But in liberation the sense that 'I' am not liberated can and does arise. It manifests as the sense of separation, of being located over here rather than over there, separate from all other people and things. It brings fear, longing and hope, and it is highly addictive. It cannot see through itself and it may simply continue for seventy or eighty years until it ends at death. Or it may end sooner, anywhere, at any time.